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The Vincentian Family and Napoleon**

John W. Carven, C.M.

On Easter Sunday, April 8, 1802, at Notre-Dame in Paris, Napoleon Bonaparte promulgated the Concordat which he had hammered out with the Holy See. This entente between Church and State brought to fruition the first aim of Bonaparte's policy with regard to religion: use the Church as one of the unifying forces in France. Subsequent to and consequent on the Concordat, he also hoped that the accord with the Church would facilitate his control over Europe and reunite under French control such former foreign missions as China, the Near East, and Madagascar. Because of their apostolic work within France prior to the French Revolution, the international aspect of their Community, and its foreign mission endeavors, some Lazarists believed that the Congregation of the Mission, if re-established by Napoleon, could further his religio-political policy. Moreover, they believed that the relationship between the Lazarists and the Daughters of Charity could facilitate the re-establishment of the Vincentians.

1789

On the eve of the French Revolution there had been established in France seven distinct provinces of the Congregation of the Mission.¹ Within these seven provinces

**This article is based on the author's book, *Napoleon and the Lazarists* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974). Lazarist was the name given to French Vincentians because of the Motherhouse Saint-Lazare. Along with the Daughters of Charity, they formed the sons and daughters of the family of St. Vincent de Paul.

¹The information for this section has been culled from Felix Contassot, C.M. *Notes d'Histoire Interne de la Congrégation de la Mission* (Paris: Archives of the Mission, unpublished manuscript).

seventy-nine houses existed. Of these houses, allowing for the fact that the priests performed diverse apostolic works from the same house, sixty-five were seminaries, forty-one provided a place of rest for those devoted to missions to the countryside, and seventeen exercised the function of parishes. Many of these same houses periodically rendered assistance to retreatants, while in others there lived Lazarists whose apostolic work was that of hospital chaplains.

At that same time, approximately eight hundred and twenty-four Lazarist priests lived in France; there are no exact figures on the number of Brothers or seminarians. It must be observed, as M. Contassot did, that even the figures on the priests should be considered as lacking complete accuracy. The basis for the statistical study was the various *Vow Books*, the books which contained the signature of each Lazarist on the day he pronounced his vows in the Congregation. These books were notoriously incomplete since some Provincials neglected to forward the information to the Superior General. Moreover, the figures enumerate those who entered the novitiates of the Congregation at either Saint-Lazare, Cahors, or Lyon, but does not take into consideration either those who departed the Congregation before becoming priests, or those who died before 1789.

In Europe, outside France, there existed at the time of the Revolution three provinces subject to the Superior General: in Italy the Province of Rome, established in 1639, and that of Lombardie; outside of Italy, the Province of Poland, erected in 1651. Lazarists were also working in Spain, the Palatinate of the Rhine, Portugal, Corsica, Austria, Hungary, Galicia, and Russia. Available information indicates that recruitment of personnel in these various Provinces and countries was not overly large. The *Catalogue of Personnel* of 1911, which lists Lazarists from the beginning of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission till the end of the eighteenth century, provides the following totals for places mentioned above: Italy — 1,547;

Poland — 1,074; Spain — 220; Portugal — 127; and Germany — 33. As previously stated, these figures were based on various *Vow Books* and, therefore, not completely accurate.

Besides their work in Europe, the Lazarists labored in far-flung areas which French interests had pervaded. The history of the foreign mission apostolate of the Congregation of the Mission began when St. Vincent de Paul dispatched some of his disciples to Tunisia in 1645, Algeria in 1646, and Madagascar in 1648. Missionaries first went to China in 1697, and in 1783 added to their own missions there those of the Jesuits. Lazarists embarked for *Ile Bourbon* and *Ile de France* in 1721; the Balearic Islands in 1736, and Madeira, in 1757, experienced the work of the Lazarists; some priests entered India in 1779; and in 1783 the Congregation of the Mission accepted responsibility for the Jesuit missions in the Levant, which at the time comprised Turkey, Greece, and Syria.²

Such was the geographical and numerical extent of the Lazarists at the beginning of the French Revolution. The Superior General residing at Saint-Lazare was empowered with the overall direction of the Congregation of the Mission wherever it was established. His rule also extended to the Company of the Daughters of Charity. On the eve of the Revolution, the Daughters of Charity staffed between 420 and 430 houses in France, as well as twenty in Poland where French Daughters first established houses in 1652, and one in Spain which received some Daughters in 1790.³ The Company embraced some 3,300 Sisters throughout Europe.

²The Royal decrees and letters patent relative to these last can be found in *Actes du Gouvernement Francais Concernant la Congrégation de la Mission* (Paris: J. Dumoulin, 1902), pp. 57-68. In 1774 the Society of Jesus was dissolved by the Holy See (the Jesuits were re-established by the Papacy in 1814).

³Sister Antoinette Deleau, Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, informed the President of the Convention Government, in a letter of November 27, 1792, that the Daughters of Charity "worked for the sick and the instruction of children in nearly all the parishes of Paris; in the whole Republic they had four

Suppression

On February 13, 1792, the French Government suppressed the Congregation of the Mission, and the Superior General, M. Jean-Felix Cayla de la Garde,⁴ fled France and eventually found his way to Rome, to the Lazarists' house of Monte Citorio. While the decree of suppression legally abolished the Lazarists in France, it did not affect their work in other countries. The Superior General, from exile in Rome, continued to supervise the Congregation and its members and the Daughters of Charity.

The French Lazarists, like other priests, numbered among their members some who died in the Reign of Terror and still others who suffered imprisonment, where in some cases they died. M. Joseph Guichard has provided the best estimates for these French Lazarists between 1792-1800.⁵ Twenty-five Lazarists are known to have been fatal victims of the Revolution: five died in the prisons at Amiens or Puy; three died on prison ships; nine fell victim to the scaffold; one was drowned in the Loire, while another died after being thrown from a window; two succumbed in Guyane at the unhealthy and scorching prison colony of Sinnamary (Devils Island); three are listed as massacred, although no further details are given; and one was murdered in the hospital of Lioubliana. Others escaped death but experienced life in prison or on prison ships. Some twenty-four have been accounted for in this category.

Lazarists were also deported or voluntarily became

hundred and twenty houses." Alexis Chevalier, *Les Soeurs de Saint Vincent de Paul et le Conseil Municipal de Paris* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1881), pp. 26-27. *La Genèse de la Compagnie* (Paris: Kremer, 1968), compiled by the Daughters of Charity, states that there were four hundred and thirty houses.

⁴Jean-Felix Cayla de la Garde was born in Rodez on February 19, 1735; he pronounced his religious vows on October 20, 1751; he died in Rome on February 12, 1800. *Notices sur les Prêtres, Clercs et Frères Defunts de la Congrégation de la Mission* (Paris: J. Dumoulin, 1910, Première Série, Tome V, p. 21.

⁵Joseph Guichard, C.M., *La Congrégation et La Révolution* (Arch. de la Mission, unpublished manuscript).

émigrés, finding their way to the Pontifical States, England Spain, and Germany. Exact figures are difficult to determine since there was some movement of the men between the various countries of exile. M. Guichard accounted for thirty-two Lazarists in exile in the Papal States, at least sixteen are known to have found their way to England, thirty-three took refuge in Spain, and some are known to have gone to Germany, but no names or numbers are listed for this latter group.

Finally, it can be asked if, and how many, Lazarists joined the Constitutional Church,⁶ and if, and how many married. Three noted Constitutionals were ex-Lazarists: Nicolas Philbert, Adrien Lammourette, and Jean-Baptiste Gratien. Another, M. Grenier, admitted in his letter to the Vicar General in 1808 that he had been Superior of a Constitutional seminary at Agen. Except for these men, there is no information on how many Lazarists might have joined the Constitutional Church. With regard to how many married, there is little or no precise information. The Vicar General, M. Brunet,⁷ wrote to M. Vicherat on April 9, 1801: "a quantity of our confreres in France have *turned bad*," and again on June 10, 1801: "Do not be surprised if you learn of the scandalous failure of certain of our confreres, their apostasy, their marriages."⁸ It has been estimated that perhaps about forty Lazarists contracted marriage despite their priestly vows.⁹

⁶National Church established by the French Revolutionary Government.

⁷François-Florentin Brunet was born at Bulgnéville on May 11, 1731, pronounced his religious vows on May 2, 1749, and died in Paris on September 15, 1806. The Superior General, Felix Cayla de la Garde, named him his Vicar, and on his death in 1800 Brunet became Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission.

⁸Arch. de la Mission (Vicaires Généraux). *Turned bad* is a euphemism for abandoning the clerical state and marrying.

⁹M. Raymond Chalumeau, C.M., archiviste for the Congregation of the Mission in France, provided this figure which, at best, is admittedly only an estimate.

Along with the Congregation of the Mission and other religious Communities, the Daughters of Charity were dissolved by the decree of the Legislative Assembly of August 18, 1792. Article 2 of the decree, however, allowed those Sisters who worked in hospitals and houses of charity to continue their service to the poor and care of the sick, but only as individuals, not as members of a religious community.¹⁰ A number of religious women availed themselves of this permission and gradually assumed some semblance of Community life which had been forbidden. Among these were some Daughters of Charity. Between 1792 and 1800 these Daughters, wearing secular dress, continued to serve a certain number of hospitals and to visit the sick. A number of these lived with Sister Deleau.¹¹

In 1800 the Congregation of the Mission did not exist in France, either legally or even clandestinely. Former Lazarists who might be dwelling in France lived there as individuals with no direct affiliation or contact with the Congregation. However, the Congregation still existed in Europe and in their foreign missions, and the Superior General, M. Cayla de la Garde, continued to direct it from Rome.

Reasons for Re-establishment

Despite the previous dissolution of the Congregation of the Mission in France, the advent of Bonaparte stimulated some Lazarists to contemplate the possible re-establishment of the Congregation. The First Consul's announced conviction of the country's need for religion¹² and the

¹⁰Chevalier, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹²At a meeting of the Council of State on August 16, 1800, Bonaparte stated that France must absolutely return in matters of religion to the point she was in 1789 when she was considered the "Eldest Daughter of the Church." (Cf. Comte Boulay de la Meurthe, *Documents sur la Négociation Du Concordat et sur les Autres Rapports de la France avec le Sainte-Siege* [Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1893-1905], I, p. 76). He later said to Thibaudeau, one of his confidants, on June 10, 1801: "A nation must have a religion and that religion must be under the control of the

measures which he initiated for the rapprochement with the Papacy — in general, the climate of opinion in France and the evolving religio-political policy of Bonaparte — caused these Lazarists to hope that their Community could be legally re-established. They based this hope on the Congregation's historical relationship to the Daughters of Charity and the foreign mission activities of the French Lazarists. Both of these historical factors provided the basis for the early relations between Bonaparte and the Congregation of the Mission.

DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

Because of the high esteem the Daughters of Charity had merited for their work in hospitals prior to the Revolution, there was a great demand for their return to this work. Reports to the First Consul from the Councilors of State on Mission in various military districts, in addition to the accounts of the general councils, had established the pitiable state in the hospitals. Throughout the reports the idea recurred that the national interest dictated the restoration of the hospital ministrations of the Daughters of Charity. Moreover, Councils General of twenty-two Departments¹³ petitioned Bonaparte for the re-establishment in their Departments of religious women for education and for hospital work. Many expressly requested that the Daughters of Charity be sent to their Departments.¹⁴ Therefore, on December 22, 1800, the Minister of the Interior, Jean-Antoine Chaptal, issued the following ministerial decree:¹⁵

government." (Cf. A. C. Thibaudeau, *Bonaparte and the Consulate*, trans. and ed. by G. K. Fortescue [London: Methuen and Co., 1908], p. 154).

¹³During the French Revolution France was divided into Departments. They would be comparable to states within the United States or a county within a particular state. A Prefect governed it.

¹⁴Pierre de la Gorce, *Histoire Religieuse de la Revolution Francaise* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1921), V, p. 180.

¹⁵Chevalier, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-115.

Considering that the succors necessary to the ill can be assiduously administered only by persons vowed by their state to the service of hospitals and directed by enthusiasm for charity;

Considering that, among all the hospitals of the Republic, those are administered with the best care, intelligence, and economy, which had called to their care the former members of this institution whose only end was the performance of all acts of charity without limit;

Considering, finally, that the solitudes and virtues necessary to the service of the poor must be inspired by example and taught by the lessons of a daily practice;

Decreed:

Art. 1—The citizeness Deleau (formerly Superioress of the Daughters of Charity) is authorized to form some disciples for the service of hospitals.

Art. 2—The house of the Foundling Hospital [Hôpital des Orphelines], rue du Vieux-Colombier, is placed, to this effect, at her disposition.

Art. 3—She will unite with herself the persons whom she will believe useful to the success of her institution, and she will choose some disciples whom she will judge proper to fulfill this goal.

Art. 4—When disciples will be requested of her for the service of humanitarian establishments, she will have the faculty of nominating those whom she will believe suitable, and will be able, if it is necessary, to send them to another destination.

Art. 5—The Government will pay three hundred francs for each disciple whose parents are judged indigent.

Art. 6—The Government will pay a sum of not to exceed 12,000 francs for the needs of the institute in the general running of the hospitals.

This decree was published in the *Moniteur* on December 30, 1800. In a report to Hercule, Cardinal Consalvi, Papal Secretary of State, Giuseppe Spina¹⁶ informed him that Bonaparte had publically re-established the Daughters of Charity.¹⁷ Rome had information of the re-establishment

¹⁶Papal negotiator of the Concordat with Napoleon.

¹⁷Boulay de la Meurthe, *Documents*, II, pp. 73-75.

even before Spina's report. M. François Brunet, Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission, wrote from Rome to Jean-Claude Vicherat in Constantinople, on April 9, 1801, that the French Government wished to confer the twenty hospitals of Paris on the Daughters.¹⁸ The ministerial decree of Chaptal was extended by an official decree of the First Consul. Dated October 16, 1802, it stated:¹⁹

Art. 1 — The Sisters, called "of Charity," are authorized, as in the past, to consecrate themselves to the service of the sick in the hospitals and in parishes, and to the instruction of poor girls;

Art. 2 — They can wear their accustomed habit;

Art. 3 — In the religious order they will be under the jurisdiction of the bishops; they will not correspond with any foreign superior.

Two observations must be made here. In his report preparatory to this decree, Jean-Etienne-Marie Portalis, Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, informed Bonaparte that the Daughters had been subject to the Superior General of the Priests of the Mission in France.²⁰ Secondly, the Daughters were not to correspond with *any foreign superior*, a point used to support the argument that it was necessary for a Frenchman to be Vicar General or Superior General of the Lazarists. This requirement played a vital part in the later discussions about leadership in the Congregation of the Mission.

The Daughters of Charity took possession of Vieux-Colombier on January 20, 1801, after the Government had made the necessary repairs. They also received an allocation of 25,000 francs for the expenses of their novitiate.²¹ The

¹⁸Arch.de la Mission (Vic. Gen.).

¹⁹Chevalier, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-127. Archives Nationales, AFIV, 421.

²⁰Bonaparte placed them under the jurisdiction of the bishops. This decision caused a schism within the Company of the Daughters of Charity and brought about the dissolution of the Congregation of the Mission in 1809.

²¹J.-B. Etienne, C.M., *Notice sur le Rétablissement de la Congrégation de la Mission après la Révolution de 1798* (Paris: Ad. Laine, 1870), p. 8. It can be

following year, January 2, 1802, the Minister of the Interior submitted a report in which he stated that sixty-four students had been admitted to the Company. Of these, twelve had been placed in different hospitals of the Departments. Besides these recruits, former Daughters had returned to the Company.²² A report of September 30, 1807, certified by the Secretary of State, Hugues B. Maret, stated that the Daughters of Charity totaled 260 houses and 1,598 Sisters.²³

The approbation which Bonaparte had manifested with regard to the Daughters of Charity raised a hope for the early re-establishment of the Lazarists whose ministrations had served to maintain the Daughters in the spirit of their Founder. The Archbishop of Paris, Jean-Baptiste de Belloy, and the abbé d'Astros, secretary to Portalis, Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, agreed that the re-establishment of the Congregation of the Mission was necessary to impart a suitable direction to the Sisters. D'Astros, in order to call this subject more efficaciously to the attention of the First Consul, sent a petition to Bonaparte in the name of Archbishop de Belloy. After reading the memorandum, the First Consul replied that, if the rules of the Lazarists contained nothing contrary to the present laws, he would consent with pleasure to their re-establishment. He wrote to the Archbishop, August 28, 1802:²⁴

I have just made a report on the various requests relative to the Daughters of Charity. It is my intention, as a testimony

mentioned here that the question of a house for the Daughters occupied the Government for over fifteen years. As a number of governmental reports testified, Vieux-Colombier was too small for their needs. Several other houses were investigated until, in 1815, they moved into the present Motherhouse, the former Hôtel de Chatillon, rue du Bac, which the city bought from the Ministry of Hospitals with money from the wine revenues of *La Halle*. The house was valued at 260,000 francs.

²²Boulay de la Meurthe, *Documents*, IV, pp. 532-533.

²³Chevalier, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

²⁴*Actes du Gouv.*, pp. XI-XII.

which I have the pleasure of rendering them, to restore to these good women all the prerogatives which they had in order to allow them to continue to do the good which they have done.

D'Astros quickly communicated to the Lazarists²⁵ Bonaparte's observations. M. Placiard²⁶ sent this news to M. Brunet on September 10, 1802, and, at the same time, requested of Brunet the information which Bonaparte desired.²⁷

M. Brunet dispatched to Placiard a draft of a memorandum to be presented to the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs. With regard to the Daughters of Charity, the memorandum stated:²⁸

The Daughters of Charity whose utility the French Government has recognized cannot preserve themselves uniformly in that spirit which renders them so precious to suffering humanity if they are not directed solely by a Superior who himself has been formed according to that spirit and knows it perfectly. The Superior General of the Lazarists is the one whom the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity assign them for Superior, the one to whom their incomparable Founder, St. Vincent de Paul, subordinated them in perpetuity. It is still indispensable that the Superior of these virtuous Daughters be French. Scarcely known outside France, their Institute could only degenerate under the authority of a foreigner. Moreover, the position of the General of the Lazarists being presently vacant, one cannot delay for a long time to fulfill it, and if they remain without a house in France, it is impossible to promise that the choice will fall on a Frenchman.

²⁵Laurent Philippe, Director of the Daughters of Charity, Claude-Joseph Placiard, whom Brunet appointed to assist Philippe, and Jean-Jacques Dubois. The latter had once shared a prison cell with Portalis.

²⁶Claude-Joseph Placiard was born at Lure (Besançon) on June 6, 1759; he pronounced his religious vows on July 29, 1777; he died at Paris on September 16, 1807. *Notices sur les Prêtres*, p. 496. Brunet named him as one of his Assistants, and, after the death of Brunet, September 15, 1806, Placiard became Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission, till his own death a year later.

²⁷Gabriel Perboyre, C.M., *La Congrégation de la Mission sous les Vicaires Généraux* (Paris: Arch. de la Miss., unpublished manuscript), pp. 10-11.

²⁸Arch. de la Miss. (Vic. Gén.).

For the Daughters of Charity to perdure and be useful to France, Brunet argued, they needed the direction of the Lazarists, and not only of Lazarists, but Lazarists who were French. Brunet emphasized this point in order to strengthen the necessity of re-establishing the Lazarists in France and to secure Bonaparte's support for the French Lazarists' claim to leadership of the world-wide Community.

FOREIGN MISSIONS

Besides their relationship with the Daughters of Charity, the foreign missions of the Congregation of the Mission strengthened the Lazarists' suit for re-establishment. Bonaparte had a lively interest in the foreign missions staffed by Frenchmen. He viewed the existence of the missions and missionaries as a matter of national self-interest and glory, as a means of spreading French influence, and a check to the manifest aggrandizement of foreign powers. Various reports of Portalis indicated that the missions contributed to France's national self-interest and glory.²⁹ Portalis maintained that while the missionaries had "for their primary end only the moral regeneration of men," they also contributed to the "glory of the French name and the interest of our national commerce."

Of equal, if not greater, importance to Bonaparte was the use he could make of the missionaries to check the aggrandizement of foreign powers in areas where France previously had an interest. Portalis specifically pointed this out to Bonaparte in the report of March 18, 1803 on the foreign missions of the "Priests of the Mission:"³⁰ "I have reported that foreign powers have sought to secure this Institute." He informed the First Consul that both England and Austria expressed their interest in the Lazarist missions

²⁹*Actes du Gouv.*, p. 69; report of November 7, 1802, Arch. Nat., AF IV, 1004, p. 98.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 72; Arch. Nat., AFIV, 1044.

in Turkey and other places in the Levant. Austria endeavored to assume the position of protector for the missions of Turkey under the pretext of preserving religion.³¹ The Spanish Government had also offered to take charge of the mission of Algiers and Tunis and had assured the Lazarists a salary on condition that the Vicar Apostolic would be a Spanish priest. The French Lazarists, in declining the offer, stated that they would only accept it if France decided to abandon them.³² In his report of November 7, 1802 Portalis stated that the "most remarkable establishment of our French missions is that of Peking." The English considered it so important, he told Bonaparte, that their Ambassador to Peking had proposed to M. Nicolas-Joseph Raux, the Superior of the Lazarists there, that he recognize England as his Mother Country. M. Pitt, the Prime Minister, also offered two young Lazarists who passed through London on their voyage to Peking to furnish them, besides free passage, an annual sum of fifty thousand pounds if they were able to convince their confreres to declare themselves an English mission.³³

Urged by Portalis, M. Brunet informed the First Consul that the "Lazarists have some houses in Barbary, Levant, Constantinople, and even China." Brunet observed that the Lazarists had a long history of missionary activity dating from the time of their Founder. He stated that the foreign missions had been staffed, for the most part, by Frenchmen whom the Superior General had taken care to send in preference to Lazarists of other nationalities.³⁴ the Lazarist missionaries, then, had benefitted past French governments

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 62 and p. 73.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 70 and p. 73.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 70.

³⁴Arch. de la Miss. (Vic. Gén.). It should be observed that Brunet desired the re-establishment of the Congregation of the Mission and, therefore, worded his memos in such a way as to please Bonaparte.

and, according to Brunet, could continue, if they were re-established in France.

Re-establishment

Napoleon, having accepted the validity of Portalis' reports, appreciated the use he could make of the Congregation of the Mission as directors of the Daughters of Charity within France and in Europe, and the advantage their foreign missions would have for the government. These were the ostensible reasons for re-establishing the Congregation of the Mission, reasons which the opposition to Napoleon could not gainsay because of the status of the Lazarists as a Secular Congregation. On May 27, 1804 he signed the decree which legally established in France *La Congrégation des Prêtres de la Mission*.³⁵

Napoleon, by the grace of God and the Constitution of the Republic, Emperor of the French, on the report of the Minister of the Admiralty and Colonies, having heard the Council of State,

Decrees the regulations, the terms of which follow:

Art. 1 — There will be an association of secular priests, who, under the title of Priests of the foreign missions [sous le titre de Prêtres des Missions étrangères], will be in charge of all missions outside of France.³⁶

Art. 2 — The Director of the foreign missions will be named by the Emperor.

Art. 3 — The foundation and the seminary will be situated in Paris in the building which will be set apart for them.³⁷

³⁵*Actes du Gouv.*, P. XVI and pp. 75-76.

³⁶It should be noted that the Paris Foreign Missions Society's title in French is hyphenated and/or capitalized: *Société des Missions-Etrangères*. Portalis claimed that this Society had only 27 men, whereas "the Lazarists, on the contrary, are still very numerous. There were 1400 members at the time of the Revolution." *Actes du Gouv.* p. 71.

³⁷Since the former Motherhouse, Saint-Lazare, had been appropriated as a prison, the Government was obligated to provide a suitable replacement. During the time of Napoleon no suitable house could be found despite all the efforts to do so. It was not until 1817 that the French Government, that of Louis XVIII, provided a house acceptable to the Lazarists, the Hôtel de Lorges, the present 95 rue de Sèvres.

Art. 4—The church depending on this building will be erected as a parish, under the invocation of St. Vincent de Paul, and officiated over by the Director of the Mission who will perform the function of curé; the vicars and assistant priests will be taken from among the missionaries.

Art. 5—The vicars, however, will remain at the disposition of the Director of the missionaries who can send them to the missions where he will judge it useful to send them.

Art. 6—There can be admitted into the house of the missions students who will receive there the instructions relative to the end of this establishment and learn foreign languages. The number of these students will not exceed what will be fixed.

Art. 7—The Director of the missionaries can send missionaries only outside of France, to all places where he will judge it suitable, after having obtained authorization and the necessary passports.

Art. 8—The Director of the missionaries will receive from the Archbishop of Paris letters of the Vicar General for the *Ile de France* and *Ile de Réunion* [Bourbon], and the head of the mission of these islands will have, henceforth, only the title of pro-Vicar General.

Art. 9—There is granted to the establishment of the missionaries an annual sum of 15,000 francs, payable quarterly and by the public treasury, beginning on the first Germinal next.

Art. 10—Provision will be made for the treatment of aged or infirm missionaries.

Art. 11—The Councilor of State charged with all affairs concerning Worship is charged with the execution of the present decree.

Some selected observations on the decree should be made in order to clarify some ambiguities and to point up Napoleon's political procedures. In issuing this decree Napoleon did not alter the laws which prohibited religious congregations except those engaged in teaching, hospital work, or those dedicated to foreign missions. The precise wording used was such that existing laws were not contravened. He therefore did not have to be concerned with arousing those still opposed to his religious policies.³⁸ M.

³⁸La Gorce, *op. cit.*, V, p. 383, in writing about the promulgation of the Concordat with the Church on Easter Sunday, April 8, 1802, at Notre-Dame Cathedral, observed that never had one seen assembled in one church so many

Etienne observed with regard to the decree re-establishing the Congregation of the Mission that the name *of the Mission* or *of the Congregation* would frighten those of an anti-religious spirit, and "if it were articulated, this measure would have encountered an invincible opposition." Napoleon appreciated the need to dissimulate by using terms and conditions which could make the decree acceptable. As a tactful political maneuver the decree re-establishing the Lazarists only recognized "a society of [secular] priests charged with preparing and guaranteeing some missionaries to serve the French missions of the Levant and China."³⁹ The terminology would make acceptable what was in reality the re-establishment of a former religious community, or, technically, a Secular Congregation which previous laws had prohibited.

Napoleon also employed other subterfuges within the decree. He used the term *Director*, for one. Moreover, the stipulations on a curé and subsidy would cause some confusion in many minds, a confusion which Napoleon seems to have intended. Political maneuvering dictated the use of the term *Director* in place of the term *Superior*. *Director* would avoid an outcry based on a revolutionary concept of equality. Moreover, similar to the Concordat's stipulation on the nomination of bishops, the Director of this society would be named by the Emperor. Nevertheless, as is known from a letter of M. Viguier⁴⁰ to Abbé Joseph Jauffret, a secretary of Portalis, the Emperor agreed that the nomination of the Director "would be understood in this sense that His Majesty would accept him whom the

people who did not believe in God. All government officials and the military had to be present.

³⁹Etienne, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁴⁰Pierre-François Viguier was born in Besançon, July 20, 1745, pronounced his religious vows at Sens on July 19, 1772, and died on February 7, 1821. *Notices sur les Prêtres*, p. 619. Brunet had appointed him the Congregation's negotiator with the French Government for its re-establishment.

Missionaries presented, after they made their choice."⁴¹ Also, as indicated, the stipulations concerning a curé and a subsidy for this foundation gave the impression that an association of diocesan priests was organized and that it was not a Secular Congregation which was established or re-established. By establishing a cure or parish staffed by the Lazarists Napoleon also hoped to provide an ecclesiastical living which could support the Institute. He intended to create a thirteenth parish for Paris. Although a church was erected under the invocation of St. Vincent de Paul near the former Saint-Lazare, this parish was never entrusted to the care of the Lazarists. Nevertheless, article 4 gave the desired impression that this decree did not re-establish an old religious community.⁴²

Finally, because of the problems caused, something must be said about the title of *Priests of the Mission* since the impression created in order to forestall opposition in governmental circles had an adverse effect on the revitalization of the Congregation of the Mission. The decree of May 27, 1804 spoke only of a society of priests charged with preparing and guaranteeing some missionaries to serve

⁴¹*Actes du Gouv.*, p. XVIII. The question of naming the Superior General (Director) came into question in 1843 at the time of the election of M. Jean-Baptiste Etienne as Superior General. The Minister of Worship requested a list of three men from which the King would choose one. The Lazarists maintained that the French governments had previously only *approved* the elections of the Superior General. This line of reasoning was finally accepted by the Government. A royal ordinance of September 26, 1843 stated simply that Etienne's election was accepted [agréé]. The election of M. Boré was accepted by decree of October 23, 1874, that of M. Fiat was accepted by decree of September 16, 1878. *Actes du Gouv.*, p. 76. As late as 1947 the French Government followed the same policy. It accepted the election of the Very Rev. William Slattery, C.M. as Superior General, but indicated that, since he was an American, he should become a French citizen because of the decree of 1804.

⁴²It can be remarked here that during the French Revolution a number of new religions flourished briefly. Of these, Theophilanthropy became the most influential. It was a natural religion based on the ideas of Voltaire and English free-thinkers. Its practitioners honored those whom they considered heroes of humanity: Socrates, St. Vincent de Paul, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Washington. Cf. A. Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution*, trans. by Lady Frazer (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), pp. 155-156.

the French missions. There was nothing in the decree itself which indicated that it must be applied to the Congregation of the Mission. Yet, Viguiier, who negotiated with Napoleon on behalf of the Lazarists, accepted for the Congregation of the Mission the title of Secular Priests of the Mission.⁴³ The confusion in the decree appeared to be more or less desired by Portalis and the Government, and this subterfuge was accepted by the leaders of the Lazarists in order to assure their re-establishment. Moreover, the decree spoke only of foreign missions and the Congregation of the Mission legally existed in France only under this title till 1964, although Napoleon had made a verbal agreement that the Lazarists would be able to resume their former works within France.

Indirect confirmation that Napoleon intended to re-establish the Congregation of the Mission emerges from the refusal by the Government to publish in the *Moniteur* an explicit announcement of the Lazarists' re-establishment and from some government documents which referred to M. Brunet as Superior of the Lazarists.

Since the decree of May 27, 1804 did not specifically name the Lazarists, many Missionaries did not think that their Congregation had been re-established. Their confusion was compounded since, by an imperial decree of March 30, 1805, which was published in the *Moniteur*, Napoleon had re-established the Foreign Missions Society and the Seminary of the Holy Spirit, the two other foreign mission groups. The Vicar General of the Lazarists, M. Brunet, who had come to Paris in October 1804 with the Papal entourage,⁴⁴ was experiencing some difficulty in reuniting the Lazarists since there had been no explicit mention of the re-establishment of the Congregation of the Mission. He

⁴³*Actes du Gouv.*, p. XVII-XIX.

⁴⁴Pope Pius VII came to Paris for the coronation of Napoleon as Emperor of France.

solicited from Cardinal Fesch, Napoleon's uncle, through a letter to Abbé Jauffret (April 29, 1805), permission to insert the following notification in the *Moniteur*:⁴⁵

By an imperial decree of [March 30, 1805] the establishment known under the designation of the Holy Spirit was re-established. The Missionaries instituted by St. Vincent de Paul, under the name of Priests of the Mission and known under that of Lazarists, had already been re-established, by virtue of another imperial decree of [May 27, 1804], for foreign missions. M. Brunet, their Superior, lives in Paris, rue de Vieux-Colombier, number 746, while waiting to be put in possession of the house which was accorded them by the Emperor for their establishment and a seminary.

M. Brunet reasoned that it would be appropriate to insert this notice in the *Moniteur* so that all the Missionaries in France and those of other countries would certainly know that the Priests of the Mission named in the decree of May 27, 1804 were the Lazarists. He claimed that the actual title under which the Congregation of the Mission had been re-established was causing problems reuniting the Lazarists in France and in re-establishing his world-wide jurisdiction.⁴⁶ Despite M. Brunet's entreaties, the Council of the Grand Almoner, Cardinal Fesch, having consulted the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, replied to M. Brunet's request that it was unnecessary to reaffirm the re-establishment of the Lazarists, or even to issue a new imperial decree to the same effect.⁴⁷ Perhaps the Council judged that such notoriety would ill-advisedly arouse an already compliant opposition to Napoleon's religious policies. Another indirect proof is provided in relation to the formation of the Council of the Grand Almoner by the decree of Cardinal Fesch on March

⁴⁵Arch. de la Miss. (Vic. Gén.).

⁴⁶Both these problems are discussed in depth in John W. Caraven, C.M., *Napoleon and the Lazarists* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 125-150.

⁴⁷Arch. de la Miss. (Vic. Gén.).

27, 1805. Among those named was "M. Brunet, Vicar General of the Lazarist Priests."⁴⁸

Because of the problem of authority in the Congregation of the Mission caused by the ambiguity of the decree of re-establishment, more direct proof is supplied in some government documents. On March 21, 1805 Napoleon wrote from Malmaison to the Pope: "The Imperial Decree of [May 27, 1804] re-established the mission called the Lazarists."⁴⁹ Cardinal Fesch also substantiated this when he wrote a letter to the Papal Secretary of State, Cardinal Consalvi (June 21, 1805), in which he referred to M. Brunet as "Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission."⁵⁰ Later in the year, an imperial decree confirmed M. Brunet as "Superior of the Mission, known under the title of Saint-Lazare."

Conclusion

There appears, then, to be no question that the Congregation of the Mission as founded by St. Vincent de Paul was re-established by the Imperial Decree of May 27, 1804. As long as the relations between Napoleon and the Holy See were harmonious, the Congregation of the Mission proved useful to the Napoleonic Government. Between 1804 and 1809 the Lazarists revitalized themselves in France. However, as Church-State relations began to deteriorate because of the growing Gallican-Ultramontane conflict,⁵¹ the usefulness of the Congregation of the Mission to the

⁴⁸Actes du Gow., p. 82.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. XXI.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. XXIII.

⁵¹The Concordat of 1801 rejuvenated the previously weakened prestige of the Holy See and established the primacy of the Pope over the bishops and Church in France. Thus Napoleon contributed to the erosion of Gallican principles and opened the way to a strengthened Ultramontanism. Simon Delacroix, *La Réorganisation de L'Eglise de France après La Révolution (1801-1809)* (Paris: Editions du Vitrail, 1962), p. 225.

Government began to wane. Just as Pope Pius VII would not be subservient to the religious or political designs of Napoleon and suffered the consequence of Napoleon's ire, imprisonment, so, too, M. Dominic-François Hanon,⁵² the Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission in 1809, balked at the Emperor's designs, and the Congregation of the Mission experienced the effect of Napoleon's irritation. M. Hanon refused to subscribe to the Emperor's plans with regard to the Daughters of Charity.⁵³ Moreover, because of the international unrest, Napoleon's interest in foreign missions was waning. As a result, the usefulness of the Congregation of the Mission to the Napoleonic Government diminished, and the Emperor, especially angered at M. Hanon's opposition to his plans with regard to the Daughters, suppressed the Congregation of the Mission and imprisoned Hanon. The Lazarists, then, in tandem, as it were, with the Papacy, experienced the effects of the rise and fall of Napoleon's religio-political policy. Only with the restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy was the Congregation of the Mission once again re-established in France.



⁵²Dominique-François Hanon was born at Saint-Pol on July 3, 1757; he pronounced his religious vows on October 21, 1774, and died on April 24, 1816 in Paris. *Notices sur les Prêtres*, p. 297. At the outbreak of the Revolution he had been Director at the diocesan seminary of Metz. After the seminary was closed, he remained in Metz before going into hiding. Joseph Girard, C.M., *Saint Vincent de Paul, Son Oeuvre et Son Influence en Lorraine* (Metz: Cure de Saint Simon, 1955, p. 171.

⁵³Napoleon planned to put the Daughters of Charity, along with other communities of religious women, under the protection of his Mother, Madame Mère, and under the jurisdiction of the bishops of France. The Superior General would not have been their Superior. Cf. Carven, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-158.

Even if the whole world were to rise up to destroy us, nothing will happen save that which is pleasing to God, in Whom we have put our trust.

St. Vincent de Paul



The things of God develop of themselves, and true wisdom consists in following Providence, step by step; be assured of a maxim which seems paradoxical: he who rushes the things of God hampers them.

St. Vincent de Paul

God does not require bodily strength from us, but a sincere disposition to seize on the opportunities of serving him according to His Will and His designs in our regard; He requires a real desire of suffering, even martyrdom, if it were His good pleasure.

St. Vincent de Paul



When the maxims of human reason are followed instead of those of faith, little progress is made in virtue and little success is obtained in matters when the glory of God is concerned.

St. Vincent de Paul